

# Case Study:

## Collaborative networks supporting advocacy

Module 7: School libraries on the agenda / Topic 2: Developing relationships

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### Abstract

*The European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy (ENSIL) is a foundation established in 2008, which grew out of an informal network of school library professionals and teachers from across Europe. The first tangible result of the network was the 'Amsterdam Statement,' a vision for the role of libraries in education. Another tangible result was the development of the advocacy campaign called ALIES, A Library In Every School. In 2009 ENSIL became involved in supporting and disseminating an Online Petition in the United Kingdom (UK) for making school libraries statutory. The response of the UK Government to this petition triggered a spontaneous action, led by ENSIL, writing a rebuttal letter to Prime Minister Mr. Gordon Brown. As a follow-up to this letter, the ALIES campaign began. Using state-of-the-art communication media such as Facebook, the ENSIL online discussion list and later Twitter and Scoop.it, the campaign took off rapidly. The campaign was adopted widely, resulting in multiple translations of the Proclamation text and the dissemination of flyers in different languages. School library advocacy campaigns developed in Australia and South Africa adopted and used the proclamation text for their own causes. The case describes the potential of networks, collaboration, and state-of-the-art communication media to lay the groundwork for a successful school library advocacy campaign.*

### Key Ideas

As you read the case study, think about the following issues:

1. The importance of collaborative strategies and practices
2. Developing and maintaining networks
3. The role of networks in contributing to an advocacy campaign
4. The role of state-of-the-art media in supporting a campaign
5. The human factor in building networks

### Profile

The European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy (ENSIL) is the only European-wide organization for school librarianship. The key goals of ENSIL are: promoting and fostering collaboration and professionalization of its stakeholders as well as dissemination of information and knowledge on school librarianship.

ENSIL had its roots in 2000, at a Regional meeting held during the annual conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) held in Malmo, Sweden. The Regional meetings at the IASL conference offer a platform for discussion and exchange of views. At the Regional meeting for conference delegates from Europe, it appeared that

that despite the differences in educational systems, library organization, culture and social background, the delegates from Europe had a mutual understanding with regard to school libraries. Their common ground was the conviction that school libraries are essential in contemporary education, that there was a lack of understanding towards school libraries from educational and political stakeholders in Europe, and that there was the need for increased professionalization of school librarians. The delegates agreed that European school librarians and teachers needed to join forces and come together to discuss in more depth the challenges and strategies to advocate for school libraries Europe-wide. However, this was easier said than done.

Organizing a European meeting demanded time, energy and money. It took three years to actually take the first step. In 2003, a group of school librarians and school library stakeholders met in Amsterdam where they formed a network, called European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy (ENSIL). The bases for this network were mutual respect, trust, common goals and friendship. The 'friendship' part is particularly interesting: most of the participants had never met before in this assembly. Monica Nillson, the Director Europe for IASL at the time, invited people who she knew and whom she considered as valuable players in the field of school librarianship in Europe.

The meeting was chaired by Lourense Das, who had the interesting task of getting 'all noses facing the same direction'. Instrumental in this respect was that, despite the language barriers, all participants shared the profound conviction that school libraries are an essential function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational landscape. This common ground, mutual respect, the acceptance of each other's expertise, the pressure of time and the willingness to achieve a tangible result, laid the foundation for long-lasting friendships among the participants. The format of the meeting: brainstorming sessions and social events, appeared to be the perfect facilitator for success. A real asset of the freshly established network was that each participant represented a larger group (i.e., association or network) of school library professionals.

The first tangible result of ENSIL was the Amsterdam Statement: the first document written for European school librarianship as a whole, rather than for school librarianship in one country. This statement formed the basis for a slowly but steady growing network of librarians and teachers. They exchanged views, ideas and cases in formal and informal encounters. It became clear that although each country, province, region or city may have its own regulations, guidelines and approach, there is a common vision on the role of libraries in education, as outlined in the Amsterdam Statement:

*The educational library fulfils an essential function in the school community by fostering and promoting reading, by enabling information literacy teaching, by building partnerships with principals, teachers, and parents and by preparing pupils and students for our complex, multimedia information and communication landscape of the 21st century. Numerous studies worldwide show children and youngsters need to be taught and trained in effective and efficient use of information presented by multiple media. They perform significantly better when special attention is paid to (the pleasure in) reading, learning how to transform*

*information into knowledge and applying this knowledge in a way that new information can be processed.*

To support this joint vision and to advocate for school libraries in Europe, ENSIL was registered as an official body in the Netherlands in 2008. It is now officially known as Stichting ENSIL (ENSIL Foundation). The decision to establish a foundation, rather than an association was based on current developments in professional associations worldwide. New communication tools, offering many the options for online collaboration and sharing have resulted in less interest in paid membership. Moreover, most ENSIL stakeholders are members of their local, regional or national association. ENSIL could act as an umbrella or hub for collaboration and cooperation without developing as an organization with multiple tasks and obligations. And there was another, maybe even more important issue: the informal, brainstorming way of making decisions and the non-hierarchical approach of the network seemed to fit better into a foundation framework.

ENSIL's stakeholders are called 'participants': they participate into discussions on ENSIL-link, the discussion list. They share information through ENSIL's website and Facebook page and there is regular bilateral communication between the original founders, participants and/or the ENSIL board. The board communicates via a Wiki. As most of ENSIL's participants represent a local, regional or national school library association, ENSIL's scope extends the range of the individuals participating in the communication mentioned above.

Since the establishment of the network, its stakeholders continue to develop partnerships with local, regional, national and even international school library organizations.

## **Discussion**

Over the past twenty years, education has changed radically. Together with technological developments, including the digitization of texts, images and audio and 24/7 access to information, many decision makers, politicians and policy advisors in and outside schools, have asked themselves "Do we still need a school library?" This question is a nightmare for librarians who may fear for the survival of their library and their jobs. However, this provocative question from the wider education sector is justified. This question was a necessary and useful wake-up call: it forces school library professionals to reflect on their own profession and role, on the usefulness and necessity of a library in the school, and on the necessity of reforms.

One of ENSIL's first calls to action came in 2010, in response to school library advocacy activities going on in England. For some years, a discussion had been going on in England about making school libraries mandatory in each school. When the Brown government offered citizens the possibility of using online petitions to draw attention to issues, a petition was drawn up in which the British Government was asked to ensure every school in England would develop and maintain their own school library. The online petition was signed by many people using modern communication media such as blogs, networking, twitter and discussion lists. Everyone, even people outside England,

were invited to participate. Eagerly the reply of the Brown government to the petition was awaited. That answer, which came on 25 January 2010, was very disappointing:

*School libraries are a key resource for pupils and teachers. They support the National Curriculum by providing books and ICT equipment, and at their best they are a valuable asset to teachers and a source of enjoyment and learning for children and young people. However, the provision of a school library is not a statutory requirement, and there are no current plans to alter this and change the legislation. It is the Government's policy to put as much money as possible directly into schools' budgets, allowing schools to target resources appropriately and to make their own choices about their school library provision and book resourcing.* Source: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page22227>

The answer was disappointing not only because the government rejected the proposal, but because the government's response was out of step with current views on learning, competence development, reading skills, information and media usage and was based on an outdated vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century school libraries..

The 'bad' news was spread quickly and caused a lot of discussion in England and beyond. It was clear that the education and library sector had not managed to convince policymakers and governments of the great importance of school libraries in the education of a media and information literate generation. The reaction of the Brown government to the school libraries petition was immediately picked up by individual and groups of education and library professionals. Spontaneously, ENSIL's coordinator, Lourense Das, started a discussion using ENSIL's and her personal network. The ENSIL Foundation, advocating for educational libraries in Europe, needed to take action. In collaboration with representatives from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the School Library Association (SLA), IASL and the School Libraries and Resource Centers Section of IFLA, an open letter was drawn up to be sent to Prime Minister Mr. Gordon Brown to ask him to reconsider the government's decision. The open letter was based on a new vision of the school library:

***Principle***

*Networks and Collaboration are essential to successfully advocate school libraries and embed the role of school libraries in education and society.*

***Statement***

*Reading, writing, finding, assessing and processing information: these are essential competences in our multimedia information society. Competences people do not naturally pick by "pressing the buttons". Numerous studies worldwide show that students perform significantly better when special attention is paid to (the enjoyment of) reading, teaching information skills, processing information into knowledge and applying this knowledge in a way new information can be processed.*

*The focus on literature (fiction and non-fiction), and multimedia information is an important task of the educational library, thus an essential role within the school. Student results can improve with 10-20% when a school library is available, led by a professional school librarian collaborating with teachers. This is convincingly*

*demonstrated in a series of scientific studies.*

*The important role of the school library in the primary educational process can only be performed if this feature is implemented in the curriculum and supported by the entire educational community.*

*The importance of professional libraries is recognized in higher and university education. Proficient use of information and good reading and writing skills are essential in the complex, multimedia information and communication landscape of the 21st century. These competences should be acquired from a young age. Independent learning and working and striving for a generation media and information literate citizens are supported if opportunities are created. A professional library in every school in England and elsewhere is not a luxury but a basic facility.*

*The relatively low investments needed to achieve this objective balance the revenue: an information and media literate generation of young people who are well prepared for further studies or career starts and ready for life-long learning.*

This vision for school librarianship mentioned above was part of the Rebuttal Letter to Prime Minister Mr. Gordon Brown. This letter was composed by a group of people from several national and international school library associations, using their networks, discussion lists to connect and finally email to set up a group of professionals to do the work. The challenges writing this letter were:

- to find a common 'speech', reflecting all the different viewpoints of the organizations and at the same time making it powerful
- to use a language that can be understood by many, although it is not everybody's native language
- to include as many organizations as possible expressing the strength of the (international) school library community
- to use current and emerging media to reach as many people as possible
- to have a long breath and not pursue a quick and easy result
- to do all this without a budget and performed by volunteers.

Soon it was clear that the ideas in this open letter could be converted to a global campaign supported through joint effort and of course using all available communication media. Jointly, representatives from ENSIL, IASL and IFLA, edited the open letter into a proclamation that could be used worldwide. Also instrumental in composing the letter and developing the Proclamation was Prof. Dr. Woody Horton, well known as one of the key persons behind the UNESCO training the trainers in Information Literacy workshops. The launch of the global campaign "A Library for Every School: Proclamation", was on 2 April 2010. This launch was approximately eight weeks after the initial reply of the UK Government to the online petition.

### **Creation of the ALIES Campaign**

Shortly after the launch of the proclamation it became clear that a short appealing acronym was needed. Because English is not everybody's language, it needed to be an acronym that was simple to pronounce and to remember in all languages. The campaign

was renamed 'A Library In Every School': ALIES. The name referred to 'Alice' as Alice in Wonderland, the well-known book by Lewis Carroll, as an example of creativity, curiosity and wisdom as well as 'Allies' or 'brothers in arms.'

In the next three years, the ALIES campaign reached thousands of people through postings in English and other languages, presentations at conferences, distribution of flyers, its Facebook page, numerous discussion lists and translations into Italian, Portuguese, Bulgarian, Serbian, Turkish and Polish. The campaign stimulated individuals and associations to use ALIES for their own statements and campaigns such as in Australia in the Australian Federal Government's national enquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians

(<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/index.htm>) and in South Africa (1 School, 1 Library, 1 Librarian – Equal Education [http://www.equaleducation.org.za/overview\\_librariescampaign](http://www.equaleducation.org.za/overview_librariescampaign))

Currently, the ALIES campaign is supported through multiple postings on the Facebook page and the scoop.it page 'School libraries around the world.' It has helped in several situations, to put school libraries back on the agenda. For example: ENSIL's chair was invited by the Bulgarian Library Association to meet representatives of the Ministry of Education, school administrators and parents in May 2011 at the Ministry of Education to discuss the content of the ALIES Campaign and prepare new initiatives. The Bulgarian Library Association had translated the flyer shortly before ENSIL's chair arrived in Sofia. The flyer was an important element in the meeting with the officials at the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. While the discussions were in English and Bulgarian with simultaneous translations, the Bulgarian-language ALIES Flyer broke the ice and stimulated the positive approach and collaboration between the participants.

The ALIES campaign was also picked up by a school librarian in Kenya, Mr. Daniel Mangale. Daniel was already active in developing school libraries in his region but he wanted to do more. Connections were made easily through email and ENSIL's chair and coordinator agreed to meet a representative of ActionAid, who made the first connection for the development of the African Network for School librarianship (ANSL). The network proved to be instrumental in finding the right people to organize a poster presentation at the African Library Summit in Gauteng, South Africa in May 2011. The ANSL is organized similar to ENSIL. It is an informal network, supported by a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AfricanNetworkforSchoolLibrarianship>

School librarians all over the world were inspired and strengthened by the campaign and developed their own action and / or translated the ALIES campaign flyer to disseminate in their own region. Most of the translations were made by (school) librarians volunteering to do so. To a large extent, the campaign was a spontaneous action, triggered by the commotion and multiple negative reactions in social media and the traditional press to the Brown government's response to the school library petition. People simply felt the need to respond and take action. There was no plan, no budget nor a professional committee dedicated to its task. The small group of people behind the campaign did not develop a structure to measure outcomes.. In other words, it was an action 'on the fly'. Taking this into consideration, the campaign can be regarded a success. With a minimum of resources, numerous school librarians were reached worldwide.

The ALIES campaign was not developed on the drawing board of a professional marketing and public relations agency. The conditions for effective campaigning were established years before; these conditions are related to the 'human factor'. The relentless efforts of many volunteers worldwide were and are crucial to the ALIES campaign's success. An important side effect of the campaign was the expansion of collaboration in the school library domain: collaboration locally, regionally, nationally and globally. This collaboration was fostered by a common vision based on mutual understanding and appreciation, trust, friendship and partnerships.

It is difficult to measure the impact of ALIES in the short and long term on the development of school libraries worldwide. A real asset to ensure collaboration were the multiple translations of the flyer. Although English is a world language understood by many, it turned out that translations have been crucial to the campaign's success. The 'open access' approach of the ALIES stakeholders ensured these multiple translations: no copyrights were involved as long as the translators submitted a copy to the ALIES administrator. In regions where school libraries are scarce, a flyer in the national language and adapted to the national situation is a true promoter of the case. In the flyer, different stakeholders are addressed and stimulated to work towards the common goal.

### **The human factor**

ENSIL developed based on shared understanding of its school library vision and rationale, but also because of 'the human factor'. ENSIL was founded in three days by individuals from different regions, speaking different languages and coming from different cultural backgrounds. There was one goal, but many different starting points to get there. How did the group make it work? The key lies in leadership.

There are multiple definitions of leadership. One of them is: *"A leader is an individual (or, rarely, a set of individuals) who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors of a significant number of individuals."* (Gardner, 1996, p. ix). Interesting in this definition is the aspect of 'affect'. Apparently affect is more important than decision making. In other words, leaders are vital in creating the right atmosphere and environment to reach a goal. The role of a leader is described in Wilson and Lyders (2001, p. 3): *"Leadership is a quality of influencing others through a sharing of vision, a respect for individual goals, an ability to build consensus, and collaborative work toward mutual purposes"*. Also in this definition the element of 'influence' is emphasized. Wilson and Lyders describe explicitly an number of elements that are essential for a leading role and practical results: *"If influence is derived from the perceptions of those to be influenced, leadership does not occur in a vacuum. The vision of those entrusted with authority and responsibility in an organization implies working toward something, toward change. Receptivity to change involves others-sharing of ideas, consensus building, and collaboration. Good leadership, then implies an involvement with people, a sharing (or at least a give and rake) of responsibility, a "bringing along" of others to make good things happen."* (Wilson & Lyders, 2001, p. 3).

To summarize, the elements of leadership include:

- showing authority and responsibility
- being able to collaborate

- showing understanding of the process of influence
- bringing about change and being receptive to change yourself
- determining of and aiming for mutual goals
- developing a vision
- being capable of coming to an agreement
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All those elements played a vital role in the development of the network ENSIL and subsequently in the ALIES Campaign. Leadership in this particular case is not a phenomenon claimed by one person, by one individual. It is a set of competencies belonging to the team that made it work.

## Summary

Networks and collaboration play a vital role in advocacy campaigns for non-profit organizations such as school library associations and institutions. Most of these organizations are run by volunteers and have limited budgets. The ALIES campaign shows that joining forces and using state-of-the-art communication tools are key components of a successful advocacy campaign. In addition, the creation of ENSIL and the success of the ALIES campaign was due to a shared vision on school libraries for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the human factors of mutual understanding, friendship, trust, and leadership..

## Questions

1. What components are essential to developing a network of school library professionals?
2. How does your association and its members develop networks? In what ways can these networks be improved?
3. What collaborative strategies and tools need to be developed in your situation to make success more likely? Think of cultural, social and language differences.
4. What means of internal and external communication is your association using? Can you think of other means of communication to use? What implications do different types of communication have? E.g.. what communication should be used in which situation?
5. Can you influence the impact of the 'human factor'? In what ways?
6. What skills do you need to lead an advocacy campaign, involving multiple organizations and individuals?

## Case Notes

Resource: Case study

Country: not applicable

Region: Europe



Agency: ENSIL

Topic: Developing relationships

Keywords: school libraries, advocacy, collaboration, networks, campaign

## Sources

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Wilson, P. P., & Lyders, J. A. (2001). *Leadership for today's school library: A handbook for the library media specialist and the school principal*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

ENSIL (European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy)

<http://www.ensil.eu>

ALIES Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/ALibraryInEverySchool/>

ENSIL-List (Discussion list) <http://list.ecompass.nl/cgi-bin/wa?A0=ENSIL-LIST>

IASL (International Association for School Librarianship) <http://www.iasl-online.org>

IFLA SLRC (School libraries and resource centers) <http://www.ifla.org/school-libraries-resource-centers>

CILIP Information Literacy Group <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/special-interest-groups/community-services/subgroups/information-literacy/pages/default.aspx>

SLA <http://www.sla.org.uk/>